

### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. of Easter -- April 26, 2020**

A lot of stress is coming out in these of stay at home orders, but also a lot of good things and a lot of good humor.

One person said -- This morning I saw a neighbor talking to her cat. It was obvious she thought her cat understood her. I came into my house, told my dog..... We laughed a lot.

Another person said – 3 weeks of home-schooling my 7, 9, and 12 year-olds went surprisingly well. They have all graduated HS and are now ready to move out and get jobs when the quarantine is over.

This confusion and frustration that we are going through these days is what we see similarly in today's gospel. In the days following Jesus' crucifixion and death the disciples were miserable. They left Jerusalem feeling hopeless and defeated – mourning the death of the one they “hoped would be the one to redeem Israel.”

This wasn't the first time they were frightened or frustrated by our Lord nor would it be the last time. The kingdom he came to offer would be greater than they were capable of imagining and the way into this kingdom would include the cross. All this was too hard to understand or to accept.

In our own life, such as these days, things can get pretty discouraging. Things don't always happen the way we think they should and we feel anger, discouragement and fear. Through good times and bad, our Lord is with us, but we are not always able to recognize his presence.

The journey of the disciples – at first going away from Jerusalem and then reversing their steps and going back to Jerusalem -- is very important for us to learn from as we are going through this amazing call to conversion that the Lord has given at the same time to all people of the world. Before the disciples were able to recognize Jesus in the stranger who was walking and talking with them, they had to have his help to reinterpret what they had experienced.

Jesus, as a stranger to them, first listened to their experiences and confusion. Then he took time to explain

to them all the prophets had foretold about their experience and how it was necessary that the Christ would have to suffer all these things before entering into his glory. Only then in the breaking and sharing of bread – the great symbol of Jesus’ whole life and death given for the good of others – were they able to recognize his presence.

Jesus will do the same for us. As I started to say in last week’s homily, Jesus wants us to come to him and share our questions and confusion and things we do not understand with him. He is waiting to listen to us and then to show us -- as he did for the disciples – a new way of looking at our life and experiences and crosses and to see how they lead to new life.

However, it was not enough that Jesus explained and helped them to reinterpret their experience of the death and possibility that he was now risen from the dead. Even though, as they said, they felt their hearts were burning as he spoke to them, they still did not recognize him, yet they welcomed this stranger to stay with them that they might hear more from him.

Why was it that they did not recognize him until he broke bread with them, and why is that this action and gesture is so important for them and for us in order recognize the risen Jesus among us?

It is because belief in Jesus and believing in the creed that we pray is not enough. We called not just to believe in all that Jesus taught and did and experienced, but to have full communion with him and in him – to truly share in his life and to be one body with him.

The breaking of bread is such a critical gesture for them and for us because in it are made present the existence of Jesus, his earthly life and ministry, and the risen Jesus now present in our midst and a foretaste of the life to come. In the preaching of St. Peter that we have in both the first and second reading today, we see that his focus is always on the death and resurrection of Jesus because this is the action of God that has brought about new life for humanity and a new age in our world.

Our baptism was not just an external gesture that marked us as belonging to a certain group. Our baptism was a baptism into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We share both in the new way of life Jesus has shown us but also in his communion with God the Father and in his power to live this new way of life. The Eucharist is so important for us because it continually renews us and nourishes us in this new communion of life that we share with Christ.

That is why it is so painful not to be able to share physically in the Eucharist though we are able to do so spiritually. This is the meaning of Jesus' words about himself being the vine and we the branches and that if we remain in him we will bear much fruit, but cut off from him we have no new life or power.

As one bishop said, we are going through a world-wide penance. It is a difficult medicine to take, but one we need to take and we see how it is slowly bringing about needed reformation and renewal in our way of living.

As we are deprived of many things we had before the coronavirus, we are forced to take a deeper look at what we really need and what our world really needs. As people in the great depression of the 1920s and 30s learned, we don't need much, but we need Jesus and we need each other and we need to work together for the good of all.

We talk about wanting to get back to normal life again. More and more it sounds like it will be some time before that will happen, and it is questionable if we will ever go back to exactly as it was before. But do we really want to go back to the old normal? Not really.

Bishop Strickland of Tyler, Texas, encourages all of us to use this time to examine our conscience and to write down all the things that we want to go away after this time and what things we want to see come back – things like keeping sacred our family meals together and no more animosity in politics, no more violence and wars, and much more.

He said we need to get back to the basics in our faith and an end to negativism in our Church as well as in our world. We need to take out things like pornography and

bring back morality, etc. So many things that humanity has planned have been canceled during these days. Instead we need to get back what we pray every day in the Lord's prayer -- "Thy will (God's will) be done. This should be our motto going forward from this time we are in.

So just as the event of Jesus's death and resurrection at first brought confusion and difficulties to the first disciples and then joy and a new understanding of all that God had done for them and the world, so is this time that our world is going through bringing us much pain and confusion at first, but through it all, we also see that Christ and the Holy Spirit have remained with us and once again as always are working to bring about a new life and communion with God and each other as was God's plan from the beginning in sending Christ to us.

As we see our need and the world's need for Christ to walk with us and help us through this time and to understand what is happening, may it give us a new appreciation and hunger for the gift of the Eucharist that we need and are deprived of at this time.